DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 576 CS 211 800

AUTHOR Speck, Bruce W.; Pabst, Thomas J.
TITLE A Cooperative Model for English Composition.
INSTITUTION Illinois Association of Teachers of English, Urbana.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT Illinois English Bulletin; v76 n3 p16-28 Spr 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Freedom; College Bound Students; *College English; College Environment; *College School Cooperation; Freshman Composition; Higher Education; High Schools; Models; School Attitudes; *School Readiness; *School Supervision; Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

The corporate structures that inform and sustain high schools and colleges are different from each other. The high school structure is required by law to provide students with surrogate parents who ensure that legal requirements are enforced. Colleges, however, assume students are adults and provide a much more open and volatile academic environment where students are given the opportunity to evaluate the world from a variety of viewpoints. Former high school students, upon entering college, are amazed at the amount of coursework they will be required to do and they are disoriented by the adult level of freedom and responsibility expected of them. Colleges and high schools can develop a cooperative program whereby a college course is taught by a college professor at the high school to help students prepare for the transition from high school to college. Such a model helps inform students about the transitions they will need to make to prepare for college. A model developed by the English Department and the Continuing Education Department at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne in conjunction with Snider High School was strongly endorsed by the composition students who participated in the cooperative program. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED306576

A Cooperative Model for English Composition

BRUCE W. SPECK
INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE UNIVERSITY
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

AND

THOMAS J. PABST
SNIDER HIGH SCHOOL
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Maxwell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

One often heard complaint made by college professors is that secondary educators simply aren't doing a good enough job preparing students for college. This complaint, often voiced in a less than charitable attitude, can be traced, in part, to the frustration professors experience when teaching high school graduates who are unfamiliar with background information needed to understand concepts introduced at college. In particular, professors of English composition wonder why high school graduates have difficulty researching a topic, writing a cohesive essay, and defending a particular position.

We believe professorial complaints about secondary education are often based on misconceptions about the supposed interrelated natures of high school and college educations. Critics of secondary education, including, but not limited to professors, often hold to this interrelated view affirming the premise that a significant part of the high school's responsibility is to prepare students for college. In essence, however, two different types of institutions are in view, even though both are educational establishments. In fact, we suggest that high schools are not designed to prepare students for college because the natures of these two educational establishments are antithetical to each other in many ways. Our purpose is to describe the relationship between these two institutions and propose a cooperative model of English composition to teach college English in a high school class and to inform high school students about the differences between high school and college. The results of this cooperative model suggest that high school students can get a better understanding of what it means to prepare for college and to make changes in their concepts of college life that will enable them to adjust more easily to a different educational culture.

CS211500

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Need for a Cooperative Model

We believe a cooperative model is essential because the structures that inform and sustain high school and college institutions are quite different. High schools labor under legal requirements that are not imposed on the college. *In loco parentis* laws, for instance, and compulsory attendance laws dictate what high schools can and cannot do with students. In fact, we argue that the legal requirements that determine or undergird many policy decisions at the high school level also have an impact on pedagogy. That is, an organization's legal structure is a powerful force in shaping the organization's mission and the way the organization carries out that mission. In a high school, stringent legal requirements can be translated into behavioral patterns that produce similar "legal" requirements pedagogically. Because law can not ultimately change, but only constrain, behavior, pedagogical "laws" seek to constrain learning behavior through the application of rules that measure acceptable or unacceptable behavior only in narrow "legalistic" terms. To illustrate our point, we will focus initially on *in loco parentis* and mandatory attendance laws to show their probable and in many cases actual influence on pedagogy.

Pedagogical Influence of Laws

In loco parentis laws transfer the authority for minors from parents or other legal guardians to school authorities, including teachers. At Snider High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the school where the cooperative model we propose was first used, *in loco parentis* laws have helped shape a policy whereby teachers are required to be in class at all times when students are in the class. Not even one student should be left alone in class because something could happen to create a legal predicament for the high school. One assumption undergirding *in loco parentis* laws is that minors are not sufficiently responsible for their actions; they are not mature enough to make legally valid decisions. Therefore, there is no warrant to give them the freedom to make choices for which they cannot be legally responsible. Thus the school represents an authority structure that is legally responsible for students' behavior.

Mandatory attendance laws also help explain the high school environment. Not only are students required by law to attend school, they are required by law to stay at school. To enforce attendance laws, schools use a variety of administrative devices. Hall passes to account for students who are not directly under an official's supervision during a designated time, attendance policies to ensure that students are

"legitimately" unable to attend school, off limit areas to warn students of their responsibility to stay within selected perimeters while in school are all ways school officials monitor mandatory attendance laws.

Teachers are primary enforcers of policies derived from legal requirements. Though they may have qualms with some policies, they would have difficulty not enforcing policies because they are contractually required to be "team players." They are legitimately, legally, responsible for ensuring that the policies work.

This commitment to the legal requirements is difficult to divorce from classroom practices. In many ways, it is incommensurate with the existing high school legal structure to give students freedoms that would nudge them toward questioning the nature of authority. After all, one of the primary purposes of all the rules is to ensure conformity in an environment that punishes rule breakers for what might seem to outsiders as minor infractions.

Thus the classroom environment is not a haven from the rigorous legal environment, but a place where the rules rule. It is not difficult to see that pedagogical laws naturally arise from such an environment. Indeed, a teacher would have to strive quite vigorously to resist the tendency to act as a parent in the formal, disciplinary sense when teaching students to accept responsibility and freedom for their educational choices, including the quality of work they intend to do. Our experience suggests that the formal, disciplinary sense of parenting inexorably creeps into pedagogical practices and manifests itself in page requirements, attention to administrative issues like the proclamation and enforcement of "correct" grammar and the reduction of style to formulaic assertions.

Page requirements, grammar, and style are not in themselves useless pedagogical issues. However, when taught as absolutes, they tend to foster a climate of subdued acceptance instead of a climate of critical inquiry. Of course, subdued acceptance may be a necessary pedagogical atmosphere in certain stages of learning, but as the dominant atmosphere it simply will not prepare students for an environment that is quite different.

Pedagogical Influence of Class Size

Although not a legal requirement, class size also has a powerful impact on pedagogical philosophy. In high schools, it is not uncommon for an English teacher to instruct 150 students each day, five days a week. The sheer number of students makes it unrealistic for a composition teacher to devote enough time to evaluate papers

thoroughly. For instance, a composition teacher with 150 students per semester would be hard pressed to read rough drafts for writing projects and make thoughtful comments for each draft and then a week or two later read all the final drafts and mark those drafts thoroughly. (When we talk about marking papers, we refer not only to giving attention to grammar and mechanics but to making substantive comments that would create a dialogue between student and teacher. Thus students would be able to read professional comments about the quality of their arguments and the evidence they use and begin to realize that composition is not simply a matter of counting grammatical and mechanical errors, nor a matter merely of "sincere" expression, but a matter of dialogue between author and reader based upon a text.)

Class size, therefore, can severely limit a teacher's opportunities for establishing the type of dialogue we have described. Larger class sizes dictate that fewer and shorter papers be written. In evaluating these papers, teachers tend to focus on obvious surface structure problems. A problem with subject-verb agreement, for example, can be unambiguously marked as incorrect. However, problems that require more explanation, like diction or the implications of defending a particular position, may be handled conveniently by citing or establishing a rule that allows for limited dialogue and limits the choices the student must make given a particular context. A particular context is not the issue, therefore, but a rule that incorrectly suggests all contexts deserve equal treatment, regardless of the writer's purpose, becomes the focus of a teacher's method. The oft cited "I came, I saw, I conquered" example of when a comma splice is appropriate should give all English teachers pause when declaring the comma splice is incorrect. This chameleon problem with language and language instruction coupled with the pressures of time and the amount of grading, preparing, and enforcing that a teacher is expected to do simply does not allow even the most dedicated teacher to make the many comments on papers he or she would like to make.

The result of evaluations that are made under these constraints is that they tend to focus on issues that can be determined to be correct or incorrect simply by an appeal to authority. If the student doesn't understand what a comma splice is, the teacher can give clear-cut examples and help the student understand how to identify and cure the malady. Why a comma splice is incorrect is not at issue. It is incorrect because the books say so. Ontological issues are seldom raised because the high school structure focuses on received knowledge as the basis for authority. To question the philosophy behind

judgments is dangerous in an environment where immature students may misunderstand the implications of questioning authority and decide to rebel by breaking rules that they don't deem to be "logical." Chaos could follow and the legal structures that guide administrative policies would be enforced by authorities outside the immediate school environment. The far reaching ramifications of such intervention chills the blood of those who would be directly responsible for explaining why chaos usurped the power of the rules that are intended to establish order.

Our point is not that all administrative policies are based on an eschatological view of tribulation; rather the potential for lawlessness is a major consideration when high schools enact policy decisions. Professors who have been absent from the high school environment a decade or longer might be struck by the presence of police officers in the high school halls during the day. The officers' role in maintaining policy or apprehending suspects is a comment on the intimate relationship between judicial requirements and the flavor of organizational culture in the high school. It is not unreasonable to extend this relationship to pedagogy, which is, after all, a primary reason high schools exist. Simply stated, legal requirements help shape pedagogical philosophy.

The College Environment

The absence of mandatory attendance and *in loco parentis* laws at colleges has a marked influence on college pedagogical philosophy as compared to high school philosophy. Students are not required by law to attend college. They seek a college education presumably because they believe college will benefit them. Professors are not legally responsible for students any more than the professor is legally responsible for any other citizen. Indeed, if a student misbehaves in a professor's classroom, the professor may call the police and have the student removed from the class. The responsibility for a college student's education rests quite solidly on the college student.

Professors also have a great deal of freedom. The kind of freedom we are thinking about was a major issue of a recent political entanglement. The Senate hearing for the Supreme Court nomination of Robert Bork focused on the differences between academic writing and more "public" writing, in Bork's case, his court decisions. Judge Bork's defenders noted that an academician has the liberty to tackle controversial issues and make controversial statements. Therefore, Bork's academic writings should be considered in light of academic

freedom, they argued. Indeed, tenure and academic freedom are two features of post-secondary education that are foundational to the liberty academicians have to address controversial issues and publish hotly debated results without undue concern about job security. High school teachers also claim academic freedom, but parental criticism of their judgments and the threat of legal controversy tend to temper their use of that freedom.

The liberty to express controversial ideas has an impact on college pedagogy. Professors tend to ask questions that assume students have the freedom to investigate a wide variety of options. The relationship between correct and incorrect answers is blurred because the reasons for adhering to an answer are often more valuable than the answer itself. Certainly some college classes are designed to elicit correct and incorrect answers, but the overall focus is on critical reasoning: Can a student defend his or her answer.

Freedom of inquiry has additional ramifications. For instance, subject matter on the college level is less prescribed than the high school curriculum. College professors often encourage their students to research topics that might seem frivolous to high school parents who want their children to gain practical skills for a career in business or industry. These parents might willingly articulate their objections to a high school teacher teaching a class on a seemingly esoteric or "off beat" topic in the high school; however these same parents are generally much more cautious about approaching professors and objecting to the professor's course content. Indeed, the college would probably defend the professor's right to investigate esoteric or "off beat" topics by appealing to the need for pure research. Pure research, as distinguished from applied research, is highly valued in many quarters of academia and learning for the sheer joy of learning is considered an appropriate quest. In fact, professors can receive grants for innovative research projects that may have few immediate, practical applications.

Implications of our Analysis

We have taken time to discuss the relationship between high school and college because the administrative structures that inform and guide these institutions are different and result in different educational environments. High schools tend to focus on accountability in strict, practical terms. Hall passes, attendance requirements, close supervision by teachers are the outcomes of an administrative philosophy based on *in loco parentis* and mandatory attendance laws. Colleges, on the other hand, have much different administrative structures that guarantee a

maximum amount of professorial freedom in teaching so that the professor is not burdened by so much attention to disciplinary and administrative details.

Indeed, the administrative requirements have a direct link to pedagogical issues. The high school environment is structured by rigorous attention to managing personnel in and outside the classroom. Thus, one can understand why high school teachers often set explicit standards for coursework, standards that college professors might not consider important. In English composition, for instance, standards for page limitations, enforcement of grammatical rules that may not be grounded in empirical data, and assignment of topics for student writers can be explained as commensurate with administrative policies that focus on clear-cut standards of behavior. Indeed, students may cry out for such standards so that they can measure their academic progress and have black-and-white guidelines that they can use to evaluate the acceptability of their work. Although these pedagogical guidelines are not necessarily improper or wrong, they tend to enforce a limited notion of freedom that in turn reinforces the tightly structured environment.

One outcome of this restrictive notion is that students tend to look for the "right" answer. They tend to believe that if they are following the guidelines, they are performing a task "properly." Decision making is based on following rules and regulations, not interpreting the validity of such rules and regulations. If students are rewarded for following the guidelines, their notion of achieving, based on adherence to surface structures or requirements, is reinforced. The issue of quality can easily be confused with following a list of concrete rules.

At the college level, following guidelines is simply expected. If a student cannot follow guidelines, such as due dates, instructions on how a paper is to be prepared, adherence to the fundamentals of composition, then the student will have a great deal of difficulty selecting a topic, formulating a thesis, gathering and interpreting data, and composing a well-written paper. The latter are more demanding processes than simply following guidelines that can be deceptively simple by appealing to quantitative issues without sufficiently considering qualitative concerns.

Now imagine a student who comes directly from a high school environment where paper topics were assigned and research (a difficult topic to teach, indeed) was limited by the high school's library resources. Imagine this student being asked to write a research paper, for instance, without a specific page requirement or number of sources. Indeed, the student is asked to write a paper based on a topic that

interests him or her. Our experience suggests that this student will experience culture shock. Suddenly the requirements that were essential to the successful completion of a project are no longer in place. Suddenly, the issues of quality and decision making abruptly replace surface structure issues as the basis for evaluation. Many students are disoriented and left wondering what to do. They experience anxiety because the requirements are much more subjective; they don't know how they can meet the expectations these requirements establish.

This hypothetical student is not so hypothetical. Most high school graduates who come to the college immediately after high school are faced with the enormous task of adjusting to a new set of standards. In addition, they are faced with the enormous amount of college work they must do, compared to their high school work load. The transition between high school and college is difficult for many students simply because colleges generally encourage a different notion of freedom and responsibility than high schools promote. At college, students are allowed a great deal of freedom to succeed or fail, given the student's ability to act responsibly. This freedom and responsibility can be explained in part by the absence of legal requirements that foster a restrictive organizational environment which is typical of the high school's corporate culture.

However, the abrupt transition between high school graduation and the first semester of college classes can be made less traumatic if students are given an opportunity to prepare for the change. If students can participate in a college class while they are still in high school, they can better understand what will be required of them when they go to college. They can then begin to make the necessary psychological adjustments that will help them be more successful at college.

Description of a Cooperative Model

The cooperative model we recommend for preparing college-bound high school seniors for college consists of having a college professor teach a college course at the high school. We will confine our remarks to English composition as a discipline for the model, but suggest that our proposal could be used successfully by other disciplines.

The model we participated in was developed by the English Department and Continuing Education at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne (IPFW) in conjunction with Snider High School. Professors in the IPFW English Department interested in teaching at the high school were identified and students at Snider High School who passed the IPFW English Department's competency test

were invited to register for three hours of introductory composition, W131. Students paid full tuition for the course. At the same time they received the normal high school credit for their high school class.

The introductory composition class was taught for fifty minutes, three days each week at the high school and the regular high school class was taught the other two days. Most of the time devoted to the high school class was on literature, although some attention was given to technical writing.

The high school teacher and college professor worked as colleagues in the classroom. For instance, the high school teacher was in the classroom during the college class and had the freedom to participate in any class discussion. Because the high school teacher was a vital part of the entire experience, he was given the title of professor during the duration of the college-high school teaching model.

Grading was the province of the college professor but he showed all graded papers to the high school teacher, who read them before returning them to the class members. The college professor sought the high school teacher's advice about the appropriateness of his grading and the high school teacher and college professor both reviewed final grades to ensure that students were given the benefit of two professional judgments.

Results of the Model

Toward the end of the course, we asked each student to complete anonymously an evaluation of the class. These evaluations, coupled with our own observations, form the basis of our assessment of the effectiveness of the cooperative model.

The evaluations confirmed two observations we had made throughout the semester. First, students were surprised about the amount of work they were required to do for a college class. One student commented, "I might as well forget working at the same time I go to college." Another student wrote, "I now understand the amount of studying I must do to stay ahead in college." Yet another student commented, "I wouldn't recommend this class to anyone who is intelligent, yet lazy. Brains don't buy it in this class. I would tell them that you have to be willing to work hard." The persistent theme of working hard was contrasted to the amount of work required in high school.

Most of the students simply didn't believe they had worked very hard in high school, compared to the college class they were taking. This difference in the amount of work required can be debilitating when

high school graduates face their first term of college work. Both the high school and college can do a great service to high school students by sensitizing them to the differences in work loads based on the difference between high school and college requirements.

Second, the college class gave them an opportunity to experience a different set of requirements that focused on responsible decision making. One student contrasted high school responsibility with college responsibility this way: "The high school level of responsibility says that if an assignment is due on Monday, then you'd better have it in by Wednesday or Thursday. If you don't, your grade will be lowered. At the college level, responsibility says that if something is due Monday at 9:00 a.m., then that's when it comes in or else it doesn't come in at all. Also, at the college level, the instructor doesn't keep reminding you that something is due. He just calls for it on the due date."

Turning in a paper on time is simply the result of a decision-making process where students are allowed to make decisions about their participation in the process that leads to achieving certain goals. Essentially, we are talking about participatory management. Deadlines, then, are related to a much larger issue: ownership. To the extent that students assume responsibility for their decisions—and are given the freedom to make decisions—to that extent they will assume ownership of their work.

High schools tend to restrict ownership because legal requirements place ownership in adults' hands. High school students are not considered adults. They cannot be trusted in ways adults can be trusted. Colleges, on the other hand, assume students are capable of ownership as adults. One student saw the differences in responsibility between high school and college as a function of how the institution sees the student. Notice this student's infant metaphor in relation to the high school's view of students.

"The responsibility we have in our other [high school] classes is much less than in this [college] class. Throughout high school we have always been led through our classes. It is comparable to a baby being spoon fed. We have grown up in a world of dittos, hand-outs, and true-n-false tests. Our only basic responsibility each day was usually, 5 minutes before the bell rings, to finish that day's worksheet. . . . In this W131 class, things are different. One is directly responsible for everything they [sic] do. You don't have to turn in one scrap of paper, as long as you know that you are responsible and the grade you receive is directly related to this responsibility."

This student makes a direct link between pedagogy and the amount of responsibility students have. Note the student's focus on pedagogical apparatus—"dittos, hand-outs, and true-n-false tests"—as symbols of an environment that allows little student responsibility. These symbols are particularly striking because the college class professor used these same pedagogical apparatus; yet, the student making the above comments says, "In this W131 class, things are different." The difference is not simply the pedagogical apparatus used, but the pedagogical focus. The student perceived that the focus in the college class was on personal responsibility. Thus the student contrasts the apparatus in the high school class with the individual in the college class.

If this student's observations were an anomaly, we would hesitate to comment on their validity, but the contrast between high school responsibility and college responsibility was affirmed by other students. For instance, another student noted:

"This class is very different from my high school classes because I have more freedom. For example, in my high school English classes, the teachers tell us exactly how to format our reports. In this class it is more up to me."

Again, the point of comparison between high school and college classes is apparatus. In this case, the student compares the format requirements for each class. The focus in the high school class is on "legal" requirements, while the focus in the college class is on personal decision making.

Our argument is that increased emphasis on personal decision making so that students begin to assume responsibility for their education is needed in a high school environment, if students are to be adequately prepared for college. In fact, students in the W131 class did begin to assume responsibility for their academic work. The following comments reveal how much students like to act responsibly.

"This class has made me more responsible for my own work, but it is a responsibility I like. . . . I was given more freedom, yet I also had more responsibility."

"I think this class has taught me to be more responsible. I don't wait until the last minute to do my projects."

"We did have a lot of freedom in this class. We got to decide whether we wanted to follow the format for our papers or even if we wanted to do them at all. We decided if we wanted to participate in class discussions. Almost everything was the student's decision."

"This class has made me more aware of the decisions I must make in writing."

"I like having freedom and responsibility because then I can set my own schedule and all the blame falls on me."

"I think that the differences between this class and my high school classes is that I worry much more about the quality of my work, and when that happens, I think it turns out better. . . . This class has helped me to think orderly and analyze situations to make sure they make sense. This class has also forced me to keep a schedule and do things as planned—act more disciplined. . . . Because we are treated like adults, we have the *choice* to do what we want. It somehow takes the pressure off, so you can ask questions and enjoy your work more. You are allowed freedom, but you must always remember your responsibilities."

Perhaps the most telling comment was made by the student who wrote, "In the college class *I* wanted to do the work, as opposed to high school in which the *teacher* wanted me to do the work. The freedom of choice in the college class made *me* set my priorities and feel responsible for my own assignments. I like being trusted, not nagged to do my own assignments." This student has understood the notion of ownership that we believe is a major difference between high school and college pedagogy. However, the student did not learn the concept from the college class. The writer comments, "I like being trusted, not nagged to do my own assignments." We understand this student to say that he or she was ready to assume the responsibility academic freedom entails before entering the W131 class. Student comments we have quoted suggest other high school students are ready to make the transition to college-level work by assuming adult roles that require both freedom and responsibility.

Conclusion

The corporate structures that inform and sustain high schools and colleges are different from each other. The high school structure is required by law to provide students with surrogate parents who ensure that legal requirements are enforced. Colleges, on the other hand, assume students are adults and provide a much more open and volatile academic environment where students are given the opportunity to evaluate the world from a variety of viewpoints. High school students who want to continue their education by going to college are quite unprepared for the dramatic changes they encounter during their first term at college. In particular, they are amazed at the amount of

coursework they will be required to do and they are disoriented by the adult level of freedom and responsibility expected of them.

To help these students prepare for the transition between high school graduation and college coursework, colleges and high schools can develop a cooperative program whereby a college course is taught by a college professor at the high school. Such a model helps inform students about the transitions they will need to make to prepare for college. They can then prepare psychologically for college by realizing how much work will be expected of them and beginning to adjust their thinking to help prepare them to meet standards heavily dependent on personal "adult" decision making. Such a cooperative program uniquely allows students to experience increased freedom, responsibility, and work load within the "safe" environment of the high school setting. It is not as if students are uprooted all at once and deposited on a college campus. The model we have described was heartily endorsed by students who participated in the cooperative program.